

**Opening Statement
Honorable Dan Burton
International Relations Hearing
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
Hearing: “The United States and South Asia”
Date: June 14, 2005
Time: 9:30A.M.
Location: 2172 Rayburn Building**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this timely and important hearing this morning to highlight the recent developments, trends, and United States policy throughout the South Asia region.

India and Pakistan

As you know, India and Pakistan have been in a constant state of military preparedness for nearly six decades. The unfriendly nature of the partition of British India in 1947 – which ultimately evolved into three wars in 1947-48, 1965, and 1971 – and the continuing dispute over Kashmir has become a major source of violence and tension around the region. Regardless of the widespread poverty throughout South Asia, both India and Pakistan have manifested their militaries into large defense establishments at the cost of social development and economic stability. These weapons include everything from overt nuclear weapons capability to ballistic missile programs. The United States must work together with Pakistan and their neighbor India to avoid a deadly, costly, and destabilizing fourth war within the region.

The United States and Pakistan have a half-century relationship of working through international security concerns, and after a brief post-Cold War era hiatus, the U.S. and Pakistan have begun to work hand in hand once again – especially since the beginning of the U.S.-led Global War on Terrorism, in which Pakistan has remanded to U.S. custody approximately 500 fugitives.

Pakistan – after the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States – pledged and has provided support for the U.S.-led anti-terrorism coalition. In fact, Pakistan afforded the United States unparalleled levels of assistance by: allowing the U.S. military to use bases within the country; tightening the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan; and, helping to identify and

detain extremists. Moreover, in a January 2002 address, President Musharraf of Pakistan vowed to end his country's use as a base for terrorism of any kind, effectively banning several militant groups.

President Musharraf is literally in a fight for his life and for the life of his country. He has made some hard choices and controversial decisions. But I firmly believe the United States must make the hard choice too and make the difficult long-term commitment to the future of Pakistan that is truly in the best interest of both Nations. Sustaining the current scale of aid to Pakistan, the United States should support Pakistan's government in its struggle against extremists with a comprehensive effort that extends from military aid to support for better education. The safety and security of our Nations depend upon the United States making a long-term economic, humanitarian, cultural, and military commitment to Pakistan.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to see India and Pakistan working together as they launched a landmark bus service across the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir. The 'peace bus' as it was noted allowed families divided by the Line of Control to be reunited for the first time in nearly 60 years. In addition, on April 18, 2005, India and Pakistan concluded a historic three-day summit in India in which Prime Minister Singh and President Musharraf held meaningful talks on all issues, including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir, and came to a series of agreements to boost trade and cross-border travel – declaring in a joint statement that they were “conscious of the historic opportunity created by the improved environment in relations.”

Nepal

Mr. Chairman, I am deeply concerned about the state of governance, rule of law and human rights in Nepal. Nepal's King Gyanendra declared a state of emergency, dismissed the government and assumed direct power. The last time there was a state of emergency in Nepal in 2001-2002 there was widespread lawlessness and serious human rights violations. There is a crisis in Nepal and not enough being done to stem the tide of violence from the nine-year civil war between rebels of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and government security forces.

Both sides of the conflict bear responsibility for subjecting the civilian population to injustices that are well-documented, including extra-judicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention. The army's disregard of Supreme Court habeas corpus orders have undermined judicial oversight of detentions, one of the most important legal protections against "disappearances."

The Maoists also perpetrate serious abuses. International groups have documented many summary executions of civilians, often preceded by torture, often in front of villagers and family members. The Maoists have assassinated or executed suspected government informants, local political activists or non-Maoist party officials, local government officials and civil servants, and individuals who refuse their extortion demands. There are reports Maoists recruit children, making them carry ammunition and supplies to the front lines. The Maoists have also abducted students from schools for political indoctrination. Demobilization and reintegration of these child soldiers is proving to be very difficult.

King Gyanendra's seizure of the levers of power last month had profound consequences. All independent Nepali media are closed down and state owned radio announced that a number of rights – including freedom of movement and freedom of assembly – are suspended.

The conflict has had a devastating impact on the population. Nepal is among the poorest countries in Asia, with almost 40% of the 23 million people living below the poverty line. Life expectancy at birth is just 59.6 years and infant and maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the region. The literacy rate is only 44 percent. Health and education services is woefully lacking and the problem is compounded in areas under Maoist control.

The Government of Nepal has refused any international or foreign mediation of the civil war against the Maoists, and resisted strong pressure to allow a joint national and international commission to monitor human rights conditions in the country. Nepal continues to host over 100,000 refugees from Bhutan and has failed to make progress in finding a durable solution to the fifteen-year impasse. UNHCR is planning to withdraw assistance in 2005, leaving the fate of the refugees uncertain. This population is at high risk of statelessness.

The international community should increase pressure on the government to respect human rights. India has opposed a larger international monitoring or mediation role in Nepal because it opposes a similar international role in Kashmir. India is also battling its own insurgent Maoist groups. The United States has continued its policy of refusing to negotiate with Maoist organizations, and has cast Nepal's Maoists as enemies in the "war on terror." More recently, the U.S. passed a bill conditioning military assistance on the government's compliance with a commitment to cooperate with the NHRC to resolve "disappearances." Last week the British government suspended a planned package of military assistance.

The international community has supported the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in its appeal to both the government and Maoists to agree to independent human rights monitoring in conflict zones. The two sides have agreed to neutral monitoring as a matter of principle, but neither side has signed a human rights accord allowing for such monitoring.

There is a total disregard for the security of civilians by both the army and the rebels. Army abuses since emergency powers were taken have spurred even greater abuses by the Maoists. An end to this conflict is only possible if both the Maoists and the Royal Nepali Army stop attacks on civilians and discipline troops responsible for these abuses. This is the first step towards the longer term goal of restoring stability in Nepal.

Unfortunately, just one short week ago, Nepal's Maoist rebels admitted a "grave mistake" and claimed responsibility for a bus bombing, which killed at least 36 people and seriously injured dozens more. The bombing provoked outrage in Nepal as the Maoists rebels continue to step up their campaign with deadly attacks on troops since King Gyanendra imposed a state of emergency and assumed absolute power on February 1, 2005.

In addition to the devastating and unfortunate bus bombing, more than 40 journalists – during their protest against curbs on press freedom – have been arrested in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu. As you know Mr. Chairman, King Gyanendra introduced restrictions on reporting after assuming direct control of Nepal.

Bangladesh

As the United States continues to focus on Bangladesh's political stability, democratization, human rights, and social and economic development, the country continues to experience widespread malnutrition and poverty. The U.S. State Department's 2003 *Bangladesh Country Report on Human Rights Practices* described the government's record on human rights as "poor." In fact, police have "employed excessive, sometimes lethal force in dealing with opposition demonstrators" and "employed physical and psychological torture during arrest and interrogations." Even more deplorable is the fact that security forces are culpable in numerous cases of "unwarranted lethal force," and "extrajudicial killings."

I am also disheartened that the government of Bangladesh does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, according to the recent U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons (TIPS) report. On the other hand, the country is making significant efforts to stem their trafficking problem. In fact, during the past year, Bangladesh demonstrated progress by: establishing inter-ministerial anti-trafficking committee to oversee its national efforts to combat trafficking; creating a national anti-trafficking police monitoring unit with presence in all 64 districts; prosecuting an increased number of trafficking and trafficking-related corruption cases; rescuing over 161 boys from servitude in the fishing industry; and, by launching a multi-faceted anti-trafficking public awareness campaign.

Moreover, as we move forward on our own U.S. trade agreements, we must also observe with watchful eyes the agreements throughout other regions of the world. In fact – just recently – Bangladesh and Iran signed a trade agreement to boost bilateral trade cooperation, with facilities to re-export products from the contracting countries to third countries – mainly in central Asia. As I have been informed, the trade agreement would facilitate trade from Bangladesh through Iran to the Islamic countries of central Asia and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), including Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Sri Lanka

The scale of devastation in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Southern Thailand and the massive loss of life throughout the rest of the region have put this Earthquake and Tsunami in the annals of history of global natural disasters. I extend my most sincere condolences to all the people of the region who have lost loved ones in this unfortunate disaster. My thoughts and prayers are with all of those families who are mourning the loss of loved ones. In Sri Lanka alone, over 31,000 persons were reportedly killed, and over 4,000 are still believed missing. As I have been informed, an estimated 496,000 Sri Lankans have been displaced from their homes.

The Sri Lankan peace process – since April 2005 – remains stalled as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) insist on self-rule. The government has expressed a desire that the LTTE restate that they would explore a federal solution to the conflict, and that discussion of Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) be part of a comprehensive peace discussion and not a precondition of such negotiations; however, factions within both the LTTE and government lead to speculation that the peace talks will remain stalled. As you know Mr. Chairman, U.S. policy has supported the efforts to reform Sri Lanka's democratic political system. The reforms should provide for full political participation of all communities, and the United States must do all in our power to play a role in multilateral peace efforts.

The U.S. State Department, in its *Sri Lanka Country Report on Human Rights Practices*, determined that the Colombo government “generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were serious problems in some areas. Some members of the security forces committed serious human rights abuses.” The report draws attention to major problems, which include torture of detainees, violence against women, poor prison conditions, child prostitution and child labor, and human trafficking. The government – in order to address some of these issues – investigated past abuses by security and armed forces personnel.

Once again Mr. Chairman, I thank you for holding this timely and critically important hearing today.